

*Archeological Monitoring of Tree Plantings
for the City of San Antonio Arborist,
San Pedro Springs Park, San Antonio,
Bexar County, Texas*



Herbert G. Uecker, Principal Investigator

Prepared for the City of San Antonio Arborist

Texas Antiquities Permit Number 3596



South Texas Archeological Research Services, LLC
Report of Investigations No. 8

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Online: www.starsarcheology.com
Email: starsllc@gvvc.com
340 Hidden Oaks Drive
Bulverde, Texas 78163-3053
Phone: 830/980-7805
Fax: 830/438-8666

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The following information is provided in accordance with the General Rules of Practice and Procedure, Chapter 41.11 (Investigative Reports), Texas Antiquities Committee:

1. Type of investigation: monitoring of tree plantings
2. Project name: City of San Antonio Arborist San Pedro Springs Park Tree Plantings
3. County: Bexar
4. Principal Investigator: Herbert G. Uecker
5. Name and location of sponsoring agency: City of San Antonio Arborist, 1901 South Alamo Street, San Antonio, Texas 78204
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Cover Photo: *View to north-northeast of second pit excavated by the City of San Antonio Arborist's Office for planting trees in San Pedro Springs Park, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. Note Works Progress Administration-style stone acequia bridge behind tree pit and houses along north side of West Ashby Street in background.*

Abstract

During mid December, 2004, South Texas Archeological Research Services, LLC, conducted archeological monitoring of tree plantings in portions of San Pedro Springs Park, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas, for the City of San Antonio Arborist. The entire park was then a designated State Archeological Landmark site (41BX19), a City of San Antonio Landmark, and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The park was first established for public use by the Spanish Crown in about 1729, as part of the first settlement in the San Antonio area by people of European extraction, which was begun in 1718. It is the second oldest commons in the United States, and is exceeded in age as a municipal open space only by the Boston Commons. Construction of the first acequia, or Spanish irrigation ditch, in the San Antonio area was begun in about 1719 in the San Pedro Springs Park vicinity.

Because of the landmark status and public ownership of the project area, the archeological work was done under Texas Antiquities Permit 3596 and was performed according to applicable provisions of the Antiquities Code of Texas (Title 9, Chapter 191, Texas Natural Resource Code) and the regulations and requirements of the Archeology Division of the Texas Historical Commission. The project was not federally linked and therefore was not subject to compliance under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

As specified in a scope of work approved by the Texas Historical Commission, the archeological work included monitoring of ground-disturbing activities associated with the project and preliminary investigation and documentation of archeological resources encountered during monitoring. The monitoring was performed by the Principal Investigator and the staff archeologist with the City of San Antonio Historic Preservation Office. Apparently all of the soil disturbed during the tree planting was fill imported to the area during about the second quarter of the twentieth century. No significant archeological resources, as defined in the scope of work, were found, collected, or curated in conjunction with the monitoring.

Based on these findings, and since no additional ground-disturbances were planned in conjunction with the tree planting project, the Principal Investigator recommended to the project sponsor and the Archeology Division of the Texas Historical Commission that no further archeological investigation of the project area was warranted. However, because all previously unexamined ground in the San Pedro Springs Park area has a relatively high probability of containing important archeological resources, the Principal Investigator also recommended that any future ground-disturbing activities within or near the park should be archeologically monitored or preceded by archeological investigations.

Acknowledgements

Several persons assisted with facilitation of the archeological work and their help was appreciated: City of San Antonio Arborist Debbie Reid, Master Gardener supervisors S. O. "Smitty" Smith and Mark Bird, and all of the volunteers from the Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists programs; City of San Antonio Historic Preservation Office archeologist V. Kay Hindes; Bexar County Historical Commission member Walter A. Schumann; and Texas Historical Commission Reviewers Debra Beene and Mark Denton.

Introduction

On December 14, 2004, South Texas Archeological Research Services, LLC (STARS), conducted archeological monitoring of the planting of 19 trees in San Pedro Springs Park, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas, for the City of San Antonio Arborist (Figures 1 and 2). The park was about 40 acres bounded on the north by West Ashby Street, on the east by San Pedro Avenue, on the south by Myrtle Street, and on the west by North Flores Street. It was a designated State Archeological Landmark site (41BX19), a City of San Antonio Landmark, and was

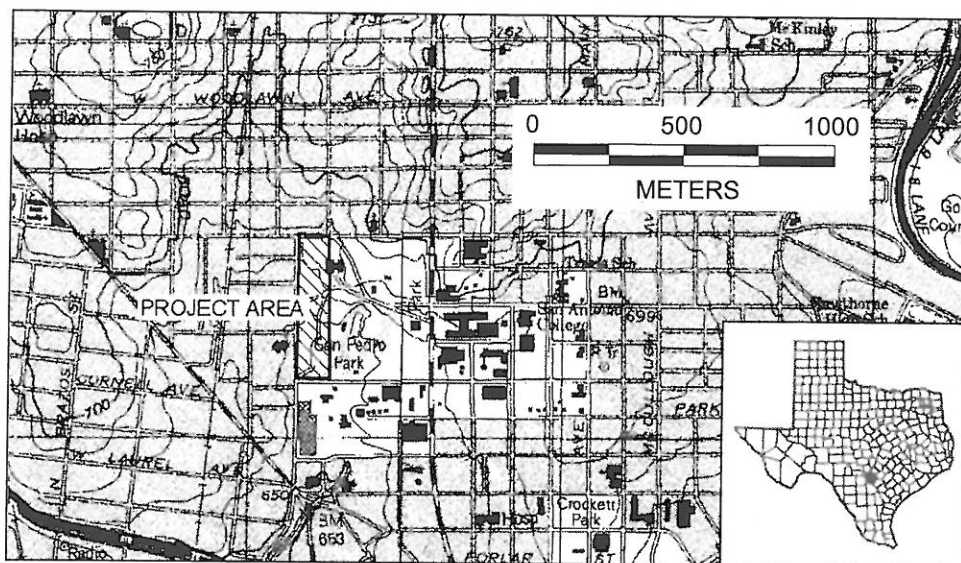


Figure 1. Copy of Section of San Antonio East USGS Topographic Quadrangle Map showing general location of project area (hatched rectangle near left center). Inset map shows location of Bexar County within Texas. North is toward top of image.

listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The project area consisted of a portion of the park roughly paralleling North Flores Street on the west side of the park and West Ashby Street on the north side of the park. The area of potential effects was the part of the project area where pits were dug to plant 19 trees.

Because of the landmark status and public ownership of the project area, the archeological work was done under Texas

Antiquities Permit 3596 and was performed according to applicable provisions of the Antiquities Code of Texas (Title 9, Chapter 191, Texas Natural Resource Code) and the regulations and requirements of the Archeology Division of the Texas Historical Commission (THC). The project was not federally linked and therefore was not subject to compliance under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

The trunk diameters of the trees were between two and three inches. The trees were in 10-gallon containers and had root bundles about 16-18 inches in diameter and about 12-16 inches tall. Due to the possibility of encountering buried archeological resources during plantings, the City Arborist selected trees that had relatively shallow root bundles. Tree pits were square in plan with about 36-inch sides and most were dug to a depth of only about one foot. A few pits were dug to depths of about 18 inches, but none of the pits exceeded that depth.

As illustrated in Figure 2, in plan, the pattern of plantings was zig-zag to curvilinear. For the plantings roughly paralleling North Flores Street, trees were sited on the gentle slopes on each side of a shallow ditch in that area. The channel of the ditch was quite uniform in configuration and depth. It was basin-shaped in transverse cross section, about 10-12 feet wide and only about 2-3 feet deep. In plan perspective, the trend of the channel was straight north-to-south, parallel to North Flores Street, and the channel center was about 35 feet east of the east curb line of the street. Small stone pedestrian bridges (see cover photo) traversed the channel at several intervals between West Ashby Street on the north side of the park and Myrtle Street on the south side of the park.

The western border of the park along North Flores Street was about 1,600 feet long. Tree plantings along this arm of the project area were confined to the distance between the intersection of North Flores Street and West Ashby Street (near the northwest corner of the park) and a point about 850 feet south of that intersection. Plantings roughly paralleling West Ashby Street were confined to the distance between that same intersection and a point about 500 feet to the east.

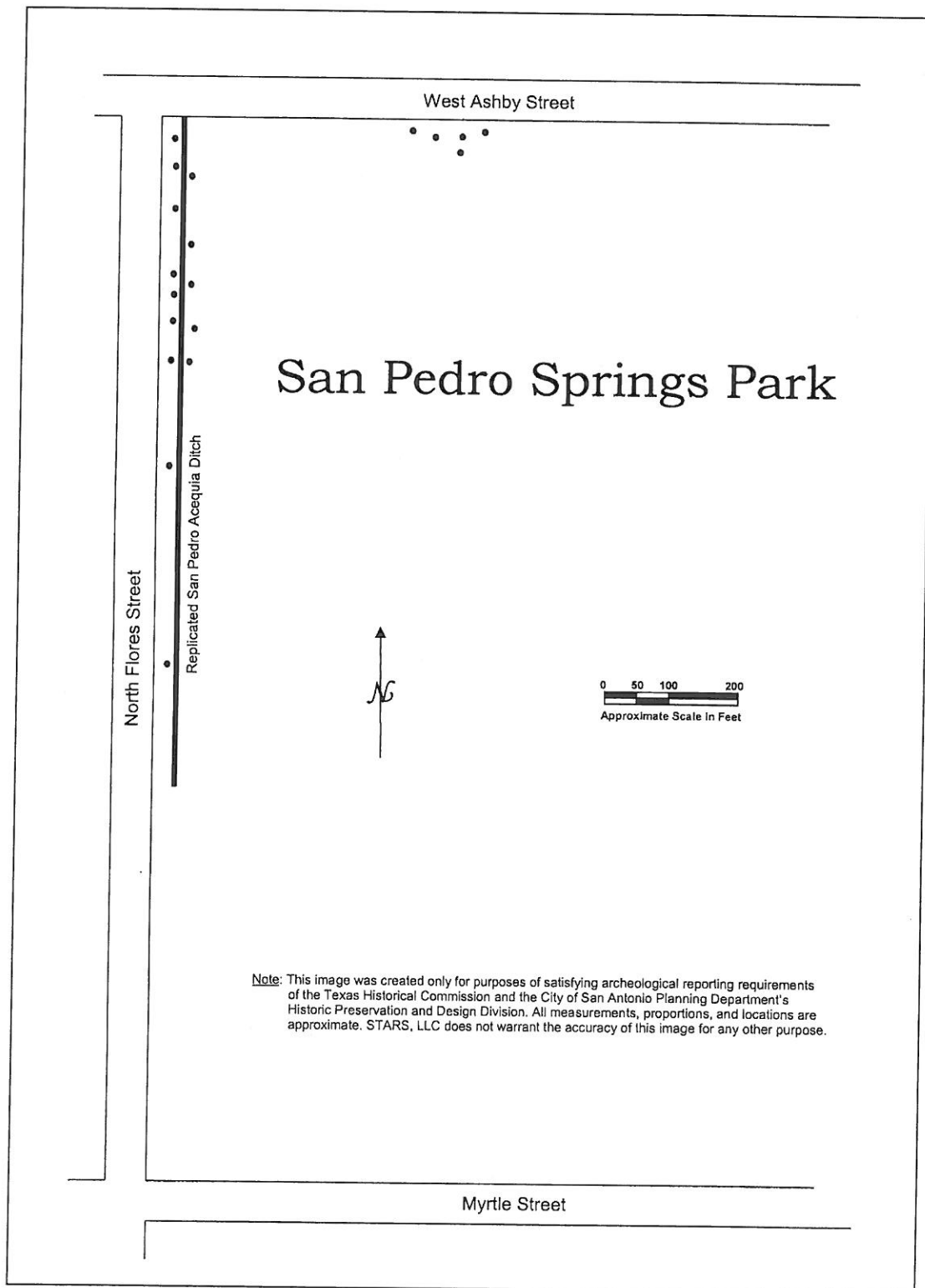


Figure 2. Detail plan of project area. Black dots are approximate locations where trees were planted.

As specified in a scope of work approved by the THC, the archeological work included monitoring of all ground-disturbing activities associated with the project and preliminary investigation and documentation of all archeological resources encountered during monitoring. Other than the imported fill otherwise described herein, no artifacts or other cultural materials were encountered during the monitoring and no artifacts or other items were collected or curated in conjunction with the project.

Background and Setting

At the time of the STARS study, the past ecology, culture history, and archeology of the central and south Texas regions had been summarized fairly recently in the archeological literature (cf. Abbott and Woodruff 1986; Black 1989a, 1989b, 1989c; Collins 1995). The archeological background of San Antonio had been recently summarized in Bousman et al. (1995) and in Cox and Fox (2002), and Cox (1997:8-44;1999:315-325;2005) had recently synthesized the historical and archeological context of the Spanish Colonial acequias of San Antonio and the history of San Antonio's development. Due to the limited scope and negative findings of the archeological work for the tree planting project, additional background information is not included in this report. The reader interested in such topics is encouraged to consult the other references cited in this section and Appendix I, which contains a summary of the general historical and archeological context of San Pedro Springs Park and vicinity as contained in the files of the Texas Sites Atlas of the Texas Historical Commission (2004).

A long-time San Antonio resident and member of the Bexar County Historical Commission, Walter A. Schumann, was present during the tree plantings. Mr. Schumann recalled that, as a young man, he observed a major remodeling of the landscape of the San Pedro Springs Park area. He believed this work was probably done by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. During the remodeling, a large natural hill just north of the park was removed and the spoil was crushed and spread over much of the park to depths of several feet. According to Mr. Schumann, the segment of the north-to-south trending ditch along the west side of the park resulted from reconstruction and channelization of the original San Pedro Acequia ditch in that vicinity. He thought that the stone pedestrian bridges traversing the ditch were probably built by the Works Progress Administration at approximately the same time as the other landscape alterations occurred. Although Mr. Schumann could not recall any precise years or dates for the work, it seems probable from his account that the work would have been done during about the early to mid 1930s. Due to the limited scope and budget of this project, no independent corroboration of Mr. Schumann's account through archival and historical background research was attempted.

Methods, Findings, and Implications

Project-associated ground-disturbing activities, which consisted of hand excavation of 19 tree planting pits, were monitored by the Principal Investigator and/or City of San Antonio Historic Preservation Office staff archeologist V. Kay Hinds. Soon after excavations were begun near the northwest corner of the park in the vicinity of the intersection of North Flores and West Ashby Streets, careful examination of the pit profiles, and test screening and hand sorting of spoil piles, revealed that none of the pits were penetrating below layers of what appeared to be imported modern caliche and clay topsoil fill that contained no artifacts or other archeological resources. Munsell values of the medium tan to yellowish caliche fill ranged from about 10YR6/3 to 10YR7/3 and the clay topsoil above the caliche was dark gray brown, with a fairly uniform Munsell value of 10YR4/1. It was obvious to the monitoring archeologists that these deposits were not naturally derived. It was subsequently determined that similar layers were present in the remaining pits dug along the ditch in that vicinity and in the five planting pits dug along the west-to-east trending arm of the project area roughly paralleling West Ashby Street. These findings tended to confirm Mr. Schumann's recollections that the entire area was covered in several feet of imported fill.

Recommendations

Since no archeological resources were encountered during the monitoring and no additional ground-disturbances were planned in conjunction with the tree planting project, the Principal Investigator recommended to the project sponsor and the Archeology Division of the Texas Historical Commission that no further archeological investigation of the project area was warranted in conjunction with the planting of 19 trees that occurred on December 14, 2004. However, due to the lengthy culture history of the park and surrounding vicinity, all previously

unexamined ground in the area has a relatively high probability of containing important archeological resources. Testing during the STARS monitoring was confined to the very small target areas where the 19 trees were planted and no additional testing was done to determine the extent of the imported fill encountered or the presence or absence of buried cultural resources in other portions of the park. Therefore, the Principal Investigator also recommended that any future non-archeological ground-disturbing activities within or near the San Pedro Springs Park area should be archeologically monitored or preceded by archeological investigations.

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Appendix I

National Register Narrative on File at the Texas Sites Atlas of the Texas Historical Commission

San Pedro Springs Park

San Pedro Park is a 40 acre municipal park surrounding the source of San Pedro Springs, a natural effluence issuing from a fissure in the limestone strata and flowing southward some 5 miles to join the San Antonio River. The area around the springs was inhabited since prehistoric times; it was the original site of the present city of San Antonio founded in 1718 and in 1729 was dedicated as a public space by the Spanish government. The site has functioned as a park continuously unto the present and currently contains facilities for athletics, a branch of the San Antonio Public Library, a theater and open parkland with paths and playgrounds.

When Spanish explorers visited the banks of San Pedro Springs in the late 17th century they found a peaceful tribe of Indians who called themselves Payayas and their village Yanaguana. The springs had provided an ample existence for many generations of these native American inhabitants as fish, game, and edible plants were abundant and the climate relatively mild. Many artifacts of aboriginal cultures have been found in the park; there may be burial sites in caves near the springs. However, adequate knowledge of the prehistoric population of San Pedro Park and their material culture awaits the necessary archeological investigation.

On April 13, 1709, an expedition of Spanish soldiers and clergy camped along the springs which they named Agua de San Pedro. The springs were surrounded by a dense grove of pecan, elm, cottonwood, hackberry, oak and mulberry trees with a thick cover of brambleberry and grape vines. In 1718 a mission and fort were established at San Pedro Springs, the Mission called San Antonio de Valero and the fort Presidio de Bexar. The soldiers constructed huts and corrals while the mission was a jacal or palisaded, structure chinked with mud and roofed with thatched tule rushes which grew abundantly along the banks of the spring.

In 1729 San Pedro Springs was dedicated by royal charter as an ejido or public land.

In 1731 the first civilian settlers were brought to Texas from the Canary Islands and permitted to settle for a time at San Pedro Springs. Later when their permanent homesteads were secured they constructed stone lined acequias, or irrigation canals, to conduct water to their gardens. These were the first of many such canals constructed, most of which have been filled. However, the remains of some are still evident in the park.

San Pedro Springs saw little further development during the remainder of the 18th century and San Antonio was all but deserted for much of the early 19th century during Mexican rule in Texas. The site was still frequented by Indians and a trading post was located at the springs during this period.

Through the short life of Texas as an independent republic, the San Pedro Springs was frequently used as a bivouac by Texas Rangers and they may have constructed the stone bunker which still stands to the east of the present public library building. Neither the builder nor the date have been documented. The structure may, in fact, date from an earlier period.

Statehood in 1845 brought prosperity and an influx of immigrants to San Antonio and by 1850 San Pedro Springs had become a popular pleasure ground for the town's citizens. Attracted by the lush beauty of the flora and cool water of the springs, families made frequent excursions by carriage from the town which was some two miles distant at that time. A restaurant and German style beer garden were built in the 1850s and served as further attractions. In 1851 the City of San Antonio officially clarified the boundaries of San Pedro Park based on the original Spanish grant and declared a square around the springs 518 varas (479 1/2 yards) from east to west and 550 varas (509 yards) from north to south encompassing 40 acres as a public reserve.

In 1864 J. J. Duerler, a landscape artist, leased the park and over the next decade developed it into a rustic stone terraced landscape of paths, ponds, bridges and exotic plants and fish. As the park's popularity grew a dance pavilion, bath house, and exhibition hall were built. The gardens included a large arched grape arbor and a picturesque grotto. Swans and rented boats floated on the lake formed by a dam below the springs; the swans lived in small wooden shelters along the shore decorated like miniature houses trimmed in the ornate Victorian modes. Horses raced on a track south of the springs where the softball fields are now located and exhibitions, fairs, speeches and rallies were all held in the park among the groves of pecan and other shade trees.

In 1891 the city of San Antonio took over operation of the park and issued permits to concessionaires who wished to operate in the park. They installed shooting galleries, ice cream and candy parlors, shops and amusements. Electric lights replaced the gas lamps that same year and no doubt added to the excitement of the carnival like atmosphere that for a time prevailed.

In 1910 a zoo was added to the park and in 1922 the large lake fed by the springs was made into a concrete swimming pool and bath houses built.

The first modern buildings in the park came in 1929 with the construction of a theater and public library. In 1954 tennis courts were built north of the springs and the swimming pool was rebuilt and modernized at that time. The racetrack was converted into a baseball field in 1901; in 1966 the old ball park was converted into a modern softball facility.

Today San Pedro Springs Park is bounded on north by Ashby Street, on the south by Myrtle Street, on the west by Flores Street and on the east by San Pedro Avenue and contains 40.006 acres. At the center of the park is the source of the springs which form three pools at the base of a terraced outcropping of limestone, and flow southward into the swimming pool. The present volume of the springs is but a fraction of its rate of flow in the 19th century; artesian wells dug into the aquifer above the park since 1900 have drastically reduced the amount of water flowing at the springs. A stairway connects the springs with a pathway which passes above them; at the head of the stairs is the remains of a 19th century Victorian columnar lamp base. A large granite shaft with ornately carved limestone base and capital now support a modern aluminum fixture; the original was a gas lantern.

Eighty yards east of the lamp column along a foot path is an octagonal balustraded gazebo covered with a red shingled bell shaped roof. The gazebo is used principally as a band stand and was brought in modern times from its original location in the park at Alamo Plaza. The gazebo rests on a circular stone foundation which in the 19th century housed bears and other wild animals for exhibition purposes.

Seventy yards southeast of the gazebo following the same foot path is an overgrown 19th century garden grotto, a popular feature of Victorian romantic landscape design. The pile of stones is covered with ferns and other greenery and may be entered by a cave-like opening.

Directly across the path to the east of the grotto is a rectangular limestone building and probably the oldest structure in the park, built either by the Spanish or Texans to defend the springs. The building is presently used as a tool shed. Southwest of the grotto is a formal garden surrounding a memorial of George Washington installed after World War I.

The 50' x 200' swimming pool just south of the springs is surrounded by a chain link fence and is flanked on the west by the bathhouse.

In the northwest quadrant of the park is the San Pedro Theater, a Greek Revival limestone building constructed in 1927 with an addition in 1962. The east facade is a reconstruction of the old San Antonio Market built in 1848; the fluted Doric columns on the theater portico were salvaged from the original market building. The portico is a quatrastyle pedimented structure with square pilasters flanking the re-used Doric columns supporting a plain frieze and cornice. A three bay wing with casement windows in each bay flanks either side of the portico.

In the northeast quadrant of the park is the McFarlin Tennis Center consisting of twenty-two fenced courts with a simple gabled service building in the center.

South of the tennis courts and east of the springs is the San Pedro Branch of the San Antonio Public Library. Built in 1928 the Renaissance Revival limestone building consists of a central hip roofed block flanked by wings to the north and south. The front (east) facade is scaled similarly to the theater building -- a three bay portico with centered entrance is flanked to the north-south by three bay wings with sash or "French" doors in each bay. A small fountain defines the library entrance.

The southeast quadrant of the park contains two softball fields with stands and attendant buildings. Driveways and footpaths with bridges over the old acequias crisscross the park; each facility now has a parking lot, new foot paths and lights were added in 1974.

SIGNIFICANCE

San Pedro Springs Park has been inhabited since prehistoric times and has functioned continuously as a public space since 1729 when King Philip V of Spain decreed the area as ejido or common land. It is probably the second oldest major municipal park in the United States; only the Boston Common is older. The history of the park and the manipulation of its landscape presents a vivid picture of 2 1/2 centuries of a city's social, political and cultural life. During its long history San Pedro Springs has been the site of an Indian village, Spanish fort and mission, military camps, racetrack, amusement park, zoo and fairgrounds and likely contains artifacts from all periods of its occupation.

San Antonio was founded just below San Pedro Springs in 1718. The town's first mission, San Antonio de Valero, later known as the Alamo, was first located near the springs. Water from the springs irrigated San Antonio's first civilian settler's gardens through stone lined acequias built in the 18th century which still can be seen in the park today. Located on the Camino Real, the road which linked the Spanish missions in east Texas with Mexico, the springs were a familiar campground first for Indians and later for soldiers, missionaries, scientific and military expeditions, and droves of teamsters. Visitors and chroniclers of the springs have included numerous Spanish colonial expeditions, Santa Anna's Mexican troops invading Texas in the 1830s, Zachary Taylor's American troops invading Mexico in 1846, Texas Rangers under the legendary Jack Hays, and an experimental expedition of 34 camels imported by then Secretary of Jefferson Davis for service in the arid southwest in 1856. Noteworthy civilian visitors to the park included Fredrick Law Olmstead, the 19th century landscape architect and designer of Central Park, and the romantic Southern poet Sidney Lanier.

As San Antonio's most popular public pleasure grounds in the second half of the 19th century, the park was a center of the city's social activity. The city's first street cars ran from town to the springs in 1878 and under the care of landscape artist and designer J. J. Duerler San Pedro Park was developed into a significant example of Victorian picturesque landscape design in Texas with grottos, gazebos, arbors, ponds, bridges, and paths stocked with exotic fish and flora. The 20th century has seen the increasing use of the park as a center of urban athletic recreation with the addition of facilities for swimming, tennis, and softball. A public library and civic theater built in 1927 serve the present community's cultural needs.

San Pedro Springs represents a potentially valuable archeological site for both the prehistoric and post 17th century material, as well as a site rich in major historical importance to the city, state and nation. The site functions today as it has for centuries as a gathering place for a variety of people and an expression of their common culture, and as such is an active and vital historical document.